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ADDRESS

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SUFFOLK TEMPERANCE UNION,

IN PARK STREET CHURCH,

SUNDAY EVENING, MARCH 15, 1868.

BY

REV. A. J. GORDON,

JAMAICA PLAIN.

BOSTON:

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ADDRESS.

THE duty of total abstinence, which I am asked to urge at this time, may seem perhaps like a hackneyed and somewhat threadbare theme; but we must remember that the temperance reform, like all great reforms, has to fight its battles over and over again on the same ground, after reasserting points and rejustifying positions which have long been regarded as impregnable by its leaders. It is unquestionably true that a large number of those who have called themselves strictly temperance men have of late receded from this advance ground of total abstinence from the use of intoxicating liquors as too radical and extreme, and have fallen back upon the middle ground of moderate drinking—that temperate zone of intemperance so salubrious for conservatives and respectable imbibers, because, forsooth, removed alike from the fever heats and torrid burnings of drunkenness on the one hand, and from the dry, cold latitudes of tetotalism on the other. And this middle ground is the "enchanted ground," on which many of our temperance men fell asleep last fall—the place of easy morality where they lost their "roll"—the roll which contained their pledge, and so were found working and voting

for a license law. On this ground a majority of those who are to be the future drunkards of our land are standing to-day, and from it proceeds really the most violent and bitter opposition to the temperance reform.

And so while the cry of compromise and moderation is, "Beware of extremes," I think that we as temperance men should take up and urge with all the energy and vehemence of which we are capable, this other cry, "Beware of the *golden mean*," so called in this matter of temperance.

"Drunkenness," says an old divine, "is one of the suburbs of hell." And we may safely say that moderate drinking is one of the suburbs of drunkenness, the most populous, the most respectable and the nearest adjacent, and therefore the most dangerous. And so I wish at this time to advance some reasons why we should reassert without qualification this old principle of total abstinence.

In the first place, for many men this is the *only possible ground*. There are many men with whom intemperance does not admit of degrees. With them the first glass involves the hundredth and the unending series by an inevitable necessity. The appetite once formed must grow, feeding and fattening on the moral life which it destroys, and bearing its victim onward with ever accelerating speed towards excess and ultimate ruin. We may account for this as we choose, attributing it to certain radical defects of the constitution, to a certain feebleness or imbecility of will; no matter;

the fact is indisputable that there are men who, once having acquired an appetite for strong drink, are morally certain to become drunkards.

Intemperance is one of those blind forces of evil that are not to be gauged by the strength of the human will. It is oftener the case that it seizes that will and holds it fast, compelling it to become the motive power to a life against which every better instinct of the soul rebels.

I have often thought that there is a strange irony in the very name which we give to the intoxicating element. We call it *spirit*, as though it were a kind of subtle, immaterial essence of evil, and not a physical substance that may be handled, and measured, and sold behind a counter. It is verily a *spirit*—that unclean spirit that "walketh through dry places seeking rest but finding none," till it has become incarnated in a man, and has seized upon all his organs and faculties and made them minister to its foul and wicked purposes. And so I have sometimes doubted whether it be really true that mind is always and every where superior to matter, when you can point to a decanter and say, There is a fluid that has proved a perfect solvent to the human will,—a liquid that has been known to utterly destroy a man's power of choice, so that he has drifted hither and thither with no strength to select between happiness and degradation, life and death.

I remember near fifteen years ago watching by a fellow student, one of the best, most upright, most religious men I have ever known, and seeing him take his first glass of liquor as pre-

scribed by his physician. No man could be more rigidly temperate or stronger in all moral and Christian principles than he had hitherto been. But I have seen him during these fifteen years going steadily downward in spite of all his efforts to the contrary, all the while crying out for deliverance but finding none who could release him. And to-day he dare not walk the streets of Boston without a guard, lest this dreadful enemy may dart out upon him from some shop window and he be led captive. O! is there any thing more pitiable on all God's footstool than to see a man thus bound hand and foot and borne on to ruin by this enemy of God and man?

Now none of us can tell what possibilities of sin and debasing excess are contained within us, or what we might be led on to do by the power of this master and overruling passion. It is possible that some of us are so strong that we could continue moderately and respectably intemperate. But it is not probable that most of us could do so. It is not natural, and it is almost impossible that a man should remain in equipoise between these two extremes. There will be a preponderance of the scale in the one or the other direction, and if it has once begun to tip towards excess it is well nigh impossible to find any counterbalancing weight, either in moral consideration or self-interest, heavy enough to turn it back.

Charles Lamb, in that remarkable chapter, "The Confessions of a Drunkard," tells us most pathetically of the utter worthlessness of exhortation against the use of intoxicating drinks to one

who has the habit upon him. The only remedy for drunkenness, he says, is in that one word "*abstain*," and if you ask the question, he says, "Is there no middle way betwixt total abstinence and the excess which kills you? . . . . For your sake, that you may never attain to my experience, with pain I must utter the dreadful truth, that there is none, *none* that I can find." And then he adds these most plaintive words of confession and warning —"Could the youth to whom the flavor of his first wine is delicious as the opening scenes of life, or the entering upon some newly discovered paradise, look into my desolation, and be made to understand what a dreary thing it is when a man shall feel himself going down a precipice with open eyes and a passive will—to see his destruction and have no power to stop it, and yet to feel it all the way emanating from himself; to perceive all goodness emptied out of him, and yet not be able to forget the time when it was otherwise,—to bear about himself the piteous spectacle of his own self in ruins; could he see my fevered eye, feverish with last night's drinking and feverishly looking for this night's repetition of the folly; could he feel the body of the death out of which I cry hourly with feebler and feebler outcry to be delivered—it were enough to make him dash the sparkling beverage to earth in all the pride of its mantling temptation; to make him clasp his teeth

—'And not undo 'em
To suffer wet damnation to run through 'em.'"

Whether fictitious or real in the case of him who wrote it, this is a veritable confession of the

drunkard's emotions, and as such is worthy to be heeded.

There is a strange charm about the wine cup to the young man. There appears to be something manly and heroic in being a tippler. And it is of little use for one who has had no experience of the evil to try to set forth its peril to such a one. But the words of an inebriate who has gone to the dregs of the cup ought to have an irresistible weight.

When the people of Rome were praising Julius Cæsar, and lauding him to the skies for his generosity, and patriotism, and magnanimity, there was one old Roman with a keener eye and sharper penetration, who said, "Take care, there is many a tyrant and usurper in the person of that young man." And so of the first glass. While to the inexperienced there is an irresistible fascination in it, he who has known its hidden curse in his own life sees in it the seeds of every kind of misery and woe, and if he speaks candidly his warning cry will be, "Beware, there is every form of moral tyranny and usurpation lying in germ within that cup."

The Orientals had a very forcible method of teaching temperance. There was a beautifully carved cup into which they poured the most delicious wine that could be found, and when a father would teach his child the desired lesson he would put this cup into his hand, bidding him drink; but when he had quaffed off the sparkling contents, there appeared from beneath the hideous form of a serpent, which, with darting fangs

and gleaming eyes, seemed just ready to strike its victim dead.

Many a man has received a most impressive temperance lecture in this way, not symbolically, alas! but in a fearfully literal experience, as, having drank to its dregs the charmed cup, he has found the truth of those words, "biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder."

Again, I would urge total abstinence on the ground that it is the *only safe course* for any man. We do not wish to introduce into our nature any new instincts of evil. Whether we believe in total depravity or not, I think we are all conscious of the presence of quite enough unruly elements within us without bringing in another which may prove a ringleader to all the rest and stir them up to insurrection. We talk about temptation,—there is little in it apart from conditions in ourselves. Temptation is only the match of the great adversary thrown into a man's soul to set him on fire of hell. Whether there shall be a conflagration or not depends on the amount of combustible material there is in him. If there is none the match will burn off its brimstone and go out, and that will be the end of it. In other words, it is not so much the temptation as our temptability that causes us to fall. There are men who are a kind of moral salamanders, that can walk through the hottest fires of temptation and come forth with not a smell of fire upon their garments. But this is not the case with most men. We are all ready to confess that we have that within us which causes us to dread

exposure to temptation. Shall we then implant gratuitously in our bosom a new appetite, the most dangerous that can possess a man? It is not the dram shops that are making the drunkards to-day. These are the effect rather than the cause. It is the appetite nurtured and cultivated under all the fostering influences of polite society. The evil thing hides itself under the cover of fashion, and so holds itself aloof and beyond the reach of those who would uproot it.

In one of the most brilliant parties given in New England during the past winter, it is reported that almost every gentleman present, after the party was broken up and the ladies were seen safely home, returned to spend the entire night in drinking, and several had to be put to bed and tended like children. And this is the way the appetite is acquired and trained. Men just beginning their education, those who are in the critical period of life, and need strengthening and guarding, are brought under just such influences as these. O, if there is any man that has occasion to fall on his knees and thank God for His mercy, it is the man who, trained amid such influences, has been kept from contracting the deadly taste.

Lastly, I would urge total abstinence as the best *course for every man.* It is the best for him intellectually, morally and socially. When we remember the problems of life and destiny that press upon us as immortal beings, I think that we must feel that we need the clearest possible intellect and the clearest and most trans-

parent spirit and heart to meet and settle those questions. But how impossible for a brain poisoned with the fumes of alcohol, to emit healthy sentiments, or to think correctly upon these great questions. In pursuing our calling and business in life we need an unclouded brain. In the discussions which we had last autumn on the question of license, I remember that a merchant said, "A prohibitory law would be the greatest injury to trade that could possibly be brought upon it." I could not help coupling this with another statement concerning a very successful merchant, viz: that it was his custom before sending a man a large bill of goods to give him a good dinner and plenty of liquor. And this preparation, he said, rarely failed to make a better customer. And there is not a little shrewdness in this. Dr. Tyler says the distinguishing characteristic of inebriates is "plausibility." They think themselves millionaires, often—able to buy anything and pay any price for it. And hence the reason for giving a customer that which will so greatly enhance his estimate of his means. How impossible that a man should be fitted for the highest success in business when under the sway of such an element! As well put the bulb of your thermometer into boiling water and expect it to indicate correctly the temperature, as to steep a man's brain in the fumes and fires of alcohol and expect him to judge correctly and act reasonably in matters of business.

And now it seems to me, in consistency with these views and for their enforcement, we need

as a Commonwealth the most stringent anti-liquor law we can possibly have. And in our efforts for the maintenance of such a law I cannot believe that we have been defeated, as some allege.

Dr. Arnold said of England that she was subject to perpetual relapses into conservatism, from which nothing but a mustard poultice applied to her feet in the form of a civil outrage or a judicial butchery could arouse her. Perhaps Massachusetts, after taking the lead so long in radical reforms, has fallen into a relapse from which only some powerful irritant in the shape of increased crime, and pauperism, and insanity, will awake her and bring her back to duty. When these things come, as they must under license, then doubtless there will be a readiness to accept strong and vigorous legislation. Not temperance men simply, but many a drunkard is calling for such a law. Weak and tempted men, finding the feebleness of their own nature, long for statutory enactments to hold them back from ruin, cry out for some law rigid enough to shut up against them the avenues of death and compel them to abstain. God grant that we may have such an enactment and be able to enforce it by a strong moral, religious and political sentiment.